

PART 409 - Conservation Planning Policy

WV409.3 (a)

All field or area office level West Virginia NRCS soil conservationists or resource conservationists, at or above the GS-9 level, are considered conservation planners and must be certified as such. Certification, and its continued maintenance, is required to maintain a soil conservationist or resource conservationist position at or above the GS-9 level in West Virginia. The State Conservationist may designate other state and area level personnel as a Certified Planning Advisor.

An NRCS employee entering into positions covered by this requirement will achieve Certified Conservation Planner status within one year of the day they enter on duty unless a variance is approved by the state conservationist or designee.

NRCS Certified Conservation Planners who have earned certification from another state shall provide documentation of the training they completed to gain certification to the NRCS state conservationist or designee. The training record will be compared to West Virginia's certification requirements. At a minimum a certified conservation planner from another state must demonstrate knowledge of West Virginia's conservation practice technical standards (eFOTG section IV) and Resource Management System Quality Criteria (eFOTG section III) by submitting one conservation plan for review. The candidate will either be granted West Virginia certification or a training program instituted leading to West Virginia certification under WV Supplement 409.9.

Candidates from the private sector may attend NRCS sponsored training events where space is available at the discretion of the West Virginia State Conservationist. A fee may be charged by NRCS to recoup actual costs of training individuals from the private sector.

WV409.3 (a)(3)

West Virginia will have two certification levels: Certified Conservation Planner and Certified Planning Advisor.

- (i) A Certified Conservation Planner is a person who possesses the necessary technical skills, training, and experience to implement the nine-step NRCS planning process in developing resource management system alternatives to meet client objectives in solving natural resource problems. The Certified Conservation Planner assists clients to identify resource problems, to express the client's objective, proposes feasible solutions to the resource problems, and assists the client in development of a feasible system which overcomes resource concerns and meets client objectives.
- (ii) A Certified Planning Advisor:
 - 1. Is able to determine that the conservation planner is at the necessary knowledge, skills, and ability (KSA) level to be certified in the content of modules 1-9 of the NRCS conservation planning course.

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2. Is able to evaluate the planning ability of conservation planners with clients in the field and give advice as to how to improve their conservation planning skills (GM 180 Part 409.9 and WV supplement to 409.9).
3. Is able to evaluate the conservation planners' knowledge, skills, and abilities of the NRCS planning process, and, make recommendation that the planner/candidate be certified, not certified, recertified, or not recertified. The certified planning advisor will provide a written recommendation to the appropriate supervisor.

WV409.3 (c) (1)

Training specific to the certification process and maintenance of the certificate will be identified in the NRCS employees' individual development plan and submitted in response to the state bulletin for training needs.

WV409.3(c) (2)

Personnel certified as a Conservation Planner or a Certified Planning Advisor must possess the Knowledge, Skills and Ability (KSA) levels per the following:

	Topic	Level for Certified Planner	Level for Certified Planning Advisor	Primary References ¹
1	Understanding and application of NRCS planning policy and procedures	4	5	~ General Manual 180 Part 409 ~ National Planning Procedures Handbook
2	Utilize NRCS planning process to plan for the following: i. Crop production ii. Livestock production iii. Wildlife management iv. Forestry production	4 4 4 4	5 5 4 4	~eFOTG, Section IV ~ Ag. Waste Mgmt. Field Handbook ~ Penn State Agronomy Guide ~WVWHET ~Woodland Information Stick ~WV Woodland Inventory Worksheet (WV-190-1)
3	Principles of soil erosion	4	5	~RUSLE2 ~ eFOTG Section II
4	Planning of practices common to the work area	4	5	~ Engineering Field Handbook ~ eFOTG Section IV
5	Principles of water quality protection/enhancement common to the work area	4	5	~ Site Vulnerability Assessment tools ~ State assessment tools (e.g. SVAP) ~ eFOTG Section III
6	RMS levels for all resources common to the work area and quality criteria and effects	4	5	~ eFOTG Section III, IV and V
7	Environmental Assessment Procedures (NEPA)	4	4	~WV CPA-052 ~eFOTG, Section II ~Cultural Resources ~T&E Species Lists ~Federal, State and Local Laws pertaining to environmental resources

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8	Current NRCS approved software for electronic plan documentation	4	4	~Customer Service Toolkit Manual
9	Current NRCS Progress Reporting System	4	4	~Performance Business Definitions

Primary **References:** References listed under this column are the primary source of information used to assess knowledge skills and abilities of individuals. Other references or sources may also be pertinent.

KSA Description:

1	Awareness	4	Apply Independently
2	Understands	5	Proficient and Can Train Others
3	Perform with Supervision		

Attainment of these KSA levels must be certified by the person designated as the supervisor for the Certified Conservation Planners or a Certified Planning Advisor.

WV409.3 (c)(3)

Candidates for conservation planning certification must:

1. Complete modules 1-5 of the NRCS Conservation Planning Course online at the following website: <http://www.nedc.nrcs.usda.gov/catalog/consplan.html>
2. Send the certificate of completion certificate to the State Resource Conservationist for modules 1-5 prior to participating in modules 6-8.
3. Complete modules 6-8 of the NRCS Conservation Planning Course. This course will be led by the State Resource Conservationist.
4. Independently develop three acceptable conservation plans with at least one RMS alternative (module 9) within 9-months of completion of modules 6-8.

No candidate attempting to obtain initial Conservation Planner Certification will receive a waiver from the requirements specified in 1-4 above.

WV409.3(d)

The State Resource Conservationist, as the State Conservationist’s designee, will maintain a list of all Certified Conservation Planners and Planning Advisors in West Virginia. The list will consist of all individuals that have met the certification requirements outlined in this policy.

WV409.9(a)

The Certified Conservation Planner designation is valid for 3 years from the date of issuance. Certification can be renewed for another 3 year period by the State Conservationist with a letter from the Assistant State Conservationist - Field Operations requesting an extension and the submission of one conservation plan which demonstrates continued knowledge, skills and abilities of the NRCS planning policies and procedures. The renewal process is continuous until the planner can no longer demonstrate the necessary training, knowledge, skills and abilities.

Non-NRCS employees will submit a written request for recertification, by the state conservationist, with documentation of Continuing Education Units (CEU’s) completed and 1 conservation plan directly to the State Resource Conservationist. The written request shall

include the quantity of CEU's completed, and a list of all plans written in the last three (3) years and their locations.

WV409.9(b)

The knowledge, skills and abilities must be demonstrated by the candidate for the conservation planner certification as outlined in 180-GM, paragraph 409.3(c)(2).

WV409.9(c)

The knowledge, skills and abilities must be demonstrated by the candidate for the conservation planner certification as outlined in 180-GM, paragraph 409.3(c)(2).

WV409.9(d)

Candidates must write and submit three independently developed conservation plans, each with a designated conservation management unit (CMU), to complete module 9. All plans submitted must include at least one Resource Management System (RMS) alternative.

- (1) The State Resource Conservationist (SRC), or their staff, as the State Conservationist's designee, will review one submitted plan in the field with the decision maker and the candidate. The field reviewed plan must be at an RMS level for a conservation management unit (CMU).
- (2) The candidate will be expected to demonstrate competency in the planning process and plan development.
- (3) The reviewer shall interview the conservation planning decision maker after the initial planning activities and prior to delivery of the final conservation plan in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the conservation planner's involvement with the decision maker.
- (4) The field reviewed plan must be approved by the State Resource Conservationist, as the state conservationist designee, prior to final delivery to the decision maker.

Each plan will have a minimum of two land uses, such as, cropland, pasture land, hayland, forest land, wildlife land or headquarters identified, and conservation practice(s) planned on the identified land uses. If the candidate is an NRCS employee, each plan submitted shall be reviewed by the candidate's immediate line officer or the Assistant State Conservationist - Field Operations, if the immediate line officer is not a certified conservation planner, prior to submission to the State Resource Conservationist. This review will be documented in the conservation assistance notes portion of the plan. One plan will be submitted at a time and the next plan will not be submitted until the previous plan has been considered complete by the State Resource Conservationist. The plan will be considered complete when the candidate receives written notification from the State Resource Conservationist that the submitted plan is acceptable. All three plans must be submitted and completed within 9 months of the completion date of modules 6-8.

If the candidate is not an NRCS employee, plans will be submitted directly to the State Resource Conservationist.

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Once a plan or plan revision is received from a candidate, the State Resource Conservationist will have a maximum of 30 calendar days to respond with comments, and, documented needed revisions, to bring the plan to an acceptable level.

Each plan will be evaluated using the [WV 180-6-Conservation Plan Evaluation](#) Form. A copy of the completed form, with comments, will be provided to the candidate. Each plan will be corrected as needed to attain minimum acceptability.

1. The first plan will be submitted within 3 months of the completion of modules 6-8. The first plan submitted by the candidate will be evaluated by the State Resource Conservationist/staff to determine acceptability as many times as necessary to achieve the minimum acceptable level. If the first plan cannot be submitted within the first 3 months, the candidate must submit in writing the reason(s) for delay to their immediate supervisor. The immediate supervisor will concur, or, not concur with this request and forwarded it to the State Resource Conservationist. The State Resource Conservationist will concur or not concur with the request and forward it to the State Conservationist for a decision.
2. The second plan submitted will be reviewed by the State Resource Conservationist/staff and returned for correction only once. If the subsequent revision still does not meet minimum acceptability the candidate must re-take modules 6-8 and re-submit the three new plans as required by module 9.
3. The third and final plan submitted for review will be evaluated by the State Resource Conservationist/staff only once. If the plan does not meet minimum acceptability the candidate will be required to re-take modules 6-8 and re-submit the three new plans as required by module 9.

After the three plans have been reviewed, corrected and finalized, the State Resource Conservationist will schedule an on-site field review to pick one of the previously submitted plans for field review. This plan will be chosen by the State Resource Conservationist/staff. The field review will occur within 60 calendar days of the candidate receiving notification of the third plans acceptability. The State Resource Conservationist will provide written notification for successful completion, or, the reasons for not successfully completing the NRCS Conservation Planning Course, to the candidate and their supervisor within 14 calendar days of the field review. If the State Resource Conservationist/staff field review reveals circumstances that lead the reviewer to believe that the candidate does not fully understand the conservation planning process, the employee will be required to re-take modules 6-8 and resubmit three new plans associated with module 9; or, other remedial action as deemed appropriate by the State Conservationist.

If three plans are not submitted and/or re-submitted for correction within the 9-month period, the candidate will be notified to re-take modules 6-9 at the next available opportunity.

All documentation submitted to the State Resource Conservationist relevant to the conservation planning certification process will be kept in an employee file including, but not limited to, records of completion of modules 1-9, copies of any plans reviewed, records of corrections and comments, etc. These files will be maintained and located at the state office.

WV409.9(e)(1)

After attaining the Certified Conservation Planner or Certified Planning Advisor status, the individual must plan for and maintain a record of completing 48 hours of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) over the 3-year period of certification.

WV409.9(e)(3)

All Certified Conservation Planners and Certified Planning Advisors are responsible for keeping their own records of CEU completed as evidence of meeting the minimum certification requirements.

For NRCS employees' the CEU must be documented on their Employee Development Plan. Any CEUs obtained by NRCS employees to maintain Conservation Planner or Advisors of Conservation Planners must receive prior approval from their Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations or SO supervisor.

Non-NRCS Employees will submit documentation regarding any course taken which will be utilized to maintain certification. Documentation will include either CEUs assigned by a professional organization or an agenda.

WV409.9(f)

The Assistant State Conservationist – Field Operations and the SRC will establish a system to ensure that each NRCS employee that is a Certified Conservation Planner has plans reviewed at least once every three years, and, that the Certified Planning Advisor reviews the requisite number of plans every three years.. Each planner shall submit at least five plans, one of which shall be a field review with the client. The review must include an assessment of the EDP to ensure the planner has met the CEU requirement for the 3-year certification period. The Assistant State Conservationist – Field Operations will submit an annual report of these reviews to the State Conservationist. This report shall include the name, title, location, and recommendation as to recertification or decertification and is due at the end of each fiscal year.

WV409.9(f)(1)

NRCS employees who are Certified Conservation Planners must develop at least 15 plans which contain at least one RMS alternative with clients, over the 3-year certification period with a minimum of 4 per year.

WV409.9(f)(2)

Certified Planning Advisors must review at least 15 plans which contain at least one RMS alternative, at least 8 of them with the planner and client in the field, with a minimum of 2 per year. Certified Planning Advisors at the state level annually will be assigned a minimum of one conservation plan with an RMS alternative to review by each of the Assistant State Conservationist - Field Operations. Documentation of this review will be provided to the field office staff and the Assistant State Conservationist - Field Operations using the [WV 180-6-Conservation Plan Evaluation](#) Form.

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At a minimum, the State Conservationist's designee(s) will review five percent (5%) of the plans submitted for review at the area level annually.

Non-NRCS employees (not under an agreement) are exempt from submitting 15 plans. They will submit a list of plans written every 3 years directly to the State Resource Conservationist. The SRC will provide the appropriate ASTC-FO a list of TSP plans to conduct a 5% quality review of those plans. If less than 4 plans have been written over the 3-year period the planner will lose their certification status.

WV409.0(f)(3)

Failure to meet any of the conditions as outlined in this policy may result in remedial training and/or the failure to grant or maintain certification. Individuals may appeal an adverse decision. Appeals will be made in writing to the State Conservationist specifying the reason for the appeal and the circumstances. Resolution of appeals will be performed within 90 calendar days of the appeal to the State Conservationist. The State Conservationist will issue a written decision to the candidate. The decision of the State Conservationist is final.

Failure to meet the requirements of conservation planning certification after the second attempt to complete module 9, the State Resource Conservationist will review the circumstances and make recommendations to the State Conservationist for further action. The State Conservationist will make the final determination as to corrective actions required.

